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DE RUEHSO #1242 3401056
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 061056Z DEC 06
FM AMCONSUL SAO PAULO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6122
INFO RHEHNSC/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 7211
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO PRIORITY 7634
RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC 2639

UNCLAS SAO PAULO 001242

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STATE INR/R/MR; IIP/R/MR; WHA/PD

DEPT PASS USTR

USDOC 4322/MAC/OLAC/JAFEE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [OPRC](#) [OIIP](#) [ETRD](#) [BR](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: WESTERN HEMISPHERE: VENEZUELA, PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION; SAO PAULO

1. "14 Years In Power"

Liberal, largest national circulation daily Folha de S. Paulo editorialized (12/5): "Chvez speaks about deepening his 'revolution.' Thus the way would be paved for another authoritarian escalation in Venezuela.... The joining of oppositionist forces, now within the rules of the game, is the best news resulting from the Venezuelan elections for those who respect democratic liberties and [democratic] change of power.... There is nothing new about Chvez's model. It resulted from an old-fashioned policy, when the historically weak institutional framework collapsed along with the traditional parties. Differently from Evo Morales in Bolivia, Hugo Chvez does not represent any emerging social movement. He is the product of a military rupture and emerged in politics in a frustrated coup attempt in 1992. Benefited by the highest oil price level in 25 years... he distributes money to the poor and transforms them into an electoral mass that supports his government. Behind the 'socialist' smoke that delights certain leftist sectors, the Caracas' caudillo reinforces the economic model that is the basis of the Venezuelan instability. If oil prices suddenly fall, the house of cards that supports Chvez will run the risk of collapsing without leaving any track."

2. "Chvez's Project"

The lead editorial in center-right O Estado de S. Paulo (12/5) commented: "President Hugo Chvez's 'Bolivarian project' has been defined for years and he has not moved a single inch from the original plan he created when he ran for president in 1989 after leading two frustrated military coup attempts.... No one knows what 'socialism of the 21st century' or 'bolivarianism' means, but everyone knows what the colonel's goals are. By using the vulnerabilities of democracy, Hugo Chvez has obtained almost absolute control of the government's structure and institutions.... With Chvez in power, the number of Venezuelans who are below the poverty line increased approximately 40 percent. The poor, however, enthusiastically support Chvez. This is true because the colonel speaks the masses' language, and because he created assistant programs that distribute money.... Chvez carries out the same open populism of President Carlos Andrs Perez, whom he tried to overthrow."

3. "[US] Political Change Is Wider"

Political commentator Newton Carlos wrote in liberal, largest national circulation daily Folha de S. Paulo (12/5): "Thomas Shannon's gesture of looking for a dialogue with Hugo Chvez is not a surprise. Since he became the Assistant Secretary of State for

Latin America, Shannon has tried to put in practice a reiterated willingness of abandoning confrontation with governments elected in the so called leftist wave in our continent. Bush's Latin American policy had been previously directed by officials linked to those who set fire Central America in the 80's and their followers, such as Roger Noriega and John Negroponte. In an interview with 'El Pais,' Shannon declared that the major challenge in the south of Rio Grande is poverty, a focus that has nothing to do with Noriega or Negroponte.... Shannon is walking on slippery ground, but he is already obtaining results.... Some say that Bush noticed something wrong in the relations with Latin America when he visited Argentina for a presidential summit and personally found out his unpopularity.

Perhaps Shannon's new ideas will gain importance. Like the idea of deepening the dialogue with Chavez."

Wolfe